



Politics or Pleasure?

Spy Film About Red China Stirs Difference of Opinion

By MILTON BERLINER

Gregory Peck, star of "The Chairman" now being filmed at Pinewood Studios near London, and Mort Abrams, its producer, don't exactly see eye to eye on the political implications of the film.

"The Chairman," a Twentieth-Century Fox project, is a suspense story that takes Dr. John Hathaway, an American scientist into Red China for a sort of confrontation with Mao-Tse-tung.

His real mission, however, is to get from Suong Li, an old friend, the secret formula for a newly discovered enzyme that enables the Chinese to grow crops under any conditions at any time of the year. Hathaway is to smuggle it out for the good of humanity everywhere.

Hathaway not only has a confrontation with Mao but also a bitter disagreement with Lt. Gen. Christopher Shelby of the U.S. Embassy in London (Arthur Hill) who is more concerned with the enzyme as an instrument of power for his own government than as a boon to humanity.

At a recent dinner interview in London's revolving Tower restaurant (on the last lap of our European trip), Peck, who plays Dr. Hathaway, said that to him "The Chairman" is "a less gimmicky James Bond movie."

(One of its more startling gimmicks is a transmitter which, implanted surgically in Dr.



Anne Heywood and Gregory Peck relax between scenes during the shooting of "The Chairman."

Hathaway's head, allows him to communicate via satellite with his colleagues in London. Hathaway, however, does not know that they can touch off an explosive tape in the transmitter and blow him up if they decide that it's necessary.)

"Hathaway is a good part," said Peck. "But it's not too much of a departure from what I've done before to be candid about it. Don't expect a startling character study. There's an honest difference of opinion between my character and Gen. Shelby who thinks our Far East policy is right.

"Personally, I'm not in agreement with the kind of ideas I occasionally express in the picture. And if I thought the film was seriously involved with those ideas I wouldn't be doing it.

"I see it as quite a clever es-

pionage film and that's the way I hope everyone will see it. Of course, "The Chairman" cuts closer to the bone than most such films, naming names."

Producer Abrams said that very definitely there is a strong political overtone to the film.

"The Chairman," he said, "will offer audiences two levels of enjoyment, either as a sheer entertainment thriller. Or as an ideological conflict between Mao's conviction that he is an instrument of History and Hathaway's humanitarian view that man's destiny is controlled consciously by the individual and not by some mystical force called History.

"An audience should be allowed to pick its own level of entertainment, and that is why we are developing these themes in terms of men, not political theses."